



Preservation Issues Dominate Board

By **Candy Moulton**
NFP Editor

Trail preservation issues dominated discussion at the Mid-Year OCTA Board meeting in Independence in April, where the Board of Directors approved a six-point resolution affirming that trail preservation is the organization's top priority.

"We don't have a lot of activities going on to demonstrate to our membership our preservation activities," National Trail Preservation Officer Dave Welch said, adding that the organization had "discussed preservation issues, but not preservation policy in the past seven years." He suggested OCTA was making a "slow migration to kind of hiding from this issue," which had become "contentious" both within and outside of OCTA.

The issue was forced to the forefront earlier this year when former national Board member Lesley Wischman from Laramie, WY publicly resigned from OCTA, citing what she said was a lack of commitment to trail preservation. That led some OCTA leaders to ask, "Are we fulfilling our primary mission?" Welch said.

Board member Edna Kennell of Casper, WY said much of the response to Wischman's resignation came from individuals affiliated with "environmental groups," not necessarily trails preservation groups, including the Wyoming Outdoor Council and the Sierra Club. Further board discussion, however, led to the suggestion that cooperation with such

organizations can help strengthen trail preservation activities.

As Board member Lethene Parks of Hunters, WA noted, confrontation may not help OCTA achieve its goals, but she added, "There may be times and places where we cannot avoid being controversial if we're going to work on our mission."

Board member Chuck Martin from Richmond, IN said the board needs to focus on long range planning and determine whether OCTA would do several things, such as develop procedures for land acquisition or take legal action to protect trail

Continued on page 7

Inside This Issue

Vancouver Convention Page 11

COED Reorganizes Page 12

Trails Legislation Page 13

New Mapping Chair Page 15

Preservation Issues

Continued from front page

resources. "Are there sites on the trail that are so precious that [OCTA] would go to all lengths to protect them?" he asked. "How serious are we about preservation? Are we serious enough that we would take legal action, or buy a piece of land and save it?"

Welch advocated developing preservation structures at the local level, so the National Preservation Officer can deal with bigger policy issues, and coordination with other groups. He said in many cases government employees looking out for trail issues are not appreciated. "Some of them are under attack ...for trying to do the work that I think

No board member objected to the need to take a stronger stand for trail preservation, but Kennell questioned issues related to viewsheds and setting. The preservation resolution states that those are important aspects of trail preservation and "we expect them to be considered in impact assessments." Kennell questioned the phrasing, suggesting that the word "expect" is too strong.

Other board members, including Chuck Martin, said there should be no attempt to "water down" the resolution wording or intent by OCTA to demand high standards with respect to trail preservation. The board approved the resolution by unanimous vote, with Kennell abstaining.

The board also agreed to commit resources for training and to develop a list of preservation projects OCTA will undertake. (See Preservation Officer report elsewhere in this issue for details.)

The issue was localized when preservation issues in Wyoming became the focus of discussion. Kennell noted that Wyoming OCTA was in

the process of developing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the chapter and Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO). It was pointed out that no chapter has the authority to negotiate or execute such agreements independent of the national OCTA.

"We cannot have chapters entering into agreements with organizations," Welch said. Such agreements need to be joint efforts between chapters and the national organization. That is "one of the fundamental problems of policy being developed at the chapter level and not at the national level," Welch said.

Board member Bill Martin of Georgetown, TX asked, "Is there a feeling in Wyoming that they are entitled to go do these things without national involvement?"



OCTA Board Members had earnest discussions about trails preservation, financing and other organizational issues at the Mid-Year Board Meeting.

this board would support," Welch said, adding in some cases there are attempts to remove the employees from their jobs because of their support of trails and other cultural resources.

The board agreed OCTA needs individuals at the local level who are knowledgeable about local and state laws as well as trail resources, and stressed that the national organization needs to develop an effective chapter program and provide training.

OCTA President Dick Pingrey urged proper training for people working on preservation issues at the national level, but Past President Randy Wagner noted that "to succeed, you have to get along with the person on the ground" and that requires local involvement. Welch agreed, noting that past successes have occurred when OCTA members have developed relationships with local managers, as in the case of the Beckwourth Trail in Nevada.

Continued on next page

Trail Preservation

Continued from previous page

Kennell replied, "I think there is some of that" adding that when Wyoming Gov. Dave Freudenthal made significant changes to the State Historic Preservation Office, OCTA was not included as a "recognized authority" on the trails. "The people they are using as licensed historians don't know about the trails," she said. The discussion about an MOU between Wyoming OCTA and SHPO came up as a way to involve the organization, she said.

Bill Martin asked again, "Is there a feeling on the part of the Wyoming chapter than they can negotiate agreements without national involvement?" To which past OCTA President Randy Wagner of Cheyenne, said, "No." But Welch said in some cases he believes the Bureau of Land Management in Wyoming goes "answer shopping." If the state BLM goes to National OCTA "they are probably not going to get the answer they want... so they go to the state organization," suggesting a belief on the part of the BLM that National OCTA has a stronger policy with respect to trail preservation than the Wyoming Chapter.

For instance, Welch said National OCTA calls for a "strong position in terms of protecting settings and viewsheds consistent with federal laws." That issue is the "major area of conflict with Wyoming

OCTA in part because the petroleum industry does not like the strict view national OCTA endorses, although he said for the most part, "we've not had problems with most of the large companies that are involved.... We have a little more resistance from the small producers." The issue is "fairly controversial," Welch said adding there are some areas in Wyoming "that are written off" for trails preservation because impacts are so significant.

Even so, Welch maintains that the "BLM in Wyoming is our friend; we don't have to agree with them on everything. We are accomplishing things by working with them."

Welch said he doesn't "challenge the dedication of our people in the Wyoming chapter to the protection of the trail," but he said some in the chapter do "not clearly understand the preservation laws," adding "that's our fault" because National OCTA has not provided adequate information and training to chapter representatives. But Welch said the Wyoming chapter is "not inclusive in its decision making. There are a lot of people in Wyoming that do not feel they are involved."

In subsequent action, the board approved the concept of entering into an MOU with Wyoming SHPO. At press time no final action had been taken.

Preservation Update

- The **Whitman Mission** eastern access hiking trail improvement project, expected to cost up to \$5,000, is underway. National OCTA has pledged funding, the NW Chapter has pledged \$750, and other funding may come from the California-Nevada Chapter and from the National Park Service.
- A project involving identification of boundaries at **South Pass** in Central Wyoming may be undertaken that would involve research and field work. The project would require professional consultants and may be funded cooperatively with the National Park Service through the Challenge Cost Share Program. A specific proposal will be developed before any action is taken. Federal lands at South Pass are managed by the Rock Springs and Lander offices of the BLM. More information about this proposed project will be presented to the OCTA Board in August.
- A number of development projects in Wyoming threaten or impact trail resources. These projects are being monitored by OCTA members living in Wyoming. The programmatic agreement on the Pinedale Anticline project is still being negotiated.
- Past trail marking projects helped protect trail segments during recent logging operations in the **Blue Mountains** of